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ABSTRACT

The University of Illinois College of Agriculture and Extension Service's 50-year commitment to a church leadership program for rural clergy was discontinued in 1980 because of changes in both rural religious structures and the College. The Church and Community Institute Committee voted in May, 1980, to disband while requesting that the University and interested Committee members seek means for providing continuing education for clergy and community leaders. Several factors probably contributed to the decision to disband: changes in denominational practices regarding rural churches made it difficult to keep clergy represented on the Committee; emphasis on broader societal issues took faculty out of their fields of expertise and more into "brokerage" positions; continuity of Extension leadership was hindered by faculty changes. Other factors were disagreement on the focus of the institute and lack of an adequate budget. Work with rural pastors originated in the 1920s and early 1930s when the College held educational meetings for farmers and other rural people dealing with the severe adjustments occurring in agriculture and rural communities; key persons perceived a need for the College to provide an opportunity for rural clergy and lay leaders to meet to discuss rural church/community concerns. (BRR)

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FACTORS RELATED TO DISCONTINUING A CHURCH
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM AFTER FIFTY YEARS OF COMMITMENT

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Factors Related to Discontinuing a Church Leadership Program
after Fifty Years of Commitment -*

As I approach my assigned topic I feel there are two different messages that may be projected by the title. One is a sense of pride in a 50-year commitment by the University of Illinois College of Agriculture and Extension Service to a church leadership program. The other is an image of "giving-up" a program that has had a long history and hopefully was a valuable service to church leadership.

My purpose today is to describe how we carried out the program, changes we made, long range planning strategies, and the decision made by the Church and Community Institute Committee on May 14, 1980 to disband. Finally, I want to give my personal assessment of why this action occurred and some views on the future.

Our work with rural pastors originated in the late 1920's and early 1930's when the University of Illinois College of Agriculture held educational meetings for farmers and rural people dealing with some of the severe adjustments occurring in agriculture and rural communities. As usually is the case in the origin of new programs, certain individuals played a key role in starting the program. These included a new young rural sociologist, D. E. Lindstrom, who eventually was to provide leadership for the program for a total of nearly 30 years, Father Nell, a rural parish priest; Dr. Ralph Cummins, the presbyter for the United Presbyterian Church in Illinois; a College Dean and a head of the Department of Agricultural Economics. These people perceived a need for the College to provide an opportunity for rural clergy and lay leaders to meet to

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discuss rural church/community concerns as a part of the Colleges' outreach to farmers and rural leaders.

Several generalizations can be made of the 50 year program without going into details. (For those who are seriously interested, I've reproduced for you a list of the conference themes and discussion topics from 1924 through 1980).

1. Rural sociologists with extension appointments in the Department of Agricultural Economics served as conference coordinators.
2. From the beginning, individual clergy and then committees of denominational representatives worked with the program coordinators and faculty in planning programs.
3. Primary sponsorship always rested with the College of Agriculture and the Cooperative Extension Service.
4. The program was always open to both clergy and lay persons throughout the entire state.
5. With only a few exceptions, registration fees were always very low. Costs of bringing in denominational resource people were borne by respective denominations. Extension paid for land-grant university personnel brought in as speakers. Extension absorbed the costs of staff time, secretarial assistance, materials, etc.
6. College and Extension administrators were always supportive of the program and viewed the program and the coordinator function as appropriate for the College and for the extension sociology program.

One key to understanding changes which occurred over the fifty year period is to note the changes made in the titles of our church leadership program. The earliest conferences were simply known as Rural Pastors Short Courses and were held in conjunction with the Colleges' Farm and Home Week along with short courses for farmers and their wives. In 1960 the name was changed to Rural

Pastors and Lay Leaders Short Course, reflecting the interest of the state committee in encouraging lay church leader participation. In 1966, the conferences were known as the Town and County Church Institute reflecting perhaps some changes within the major denominations themselves regarding rural church work. Finally, in 1969 the name was changed again to the Church and Community Institute. I believe if one examines the themes of the conferences year by year one will see some correlation between the types of issues addressed over the years and the names of the church leadership program.

Attendance over the years for which we have records fluctuated from a high of 303 to a low of only 35. The highest attendance occurred in 1964, 1965 and 1966:

1964 - Church Roles in Rural Change	- 267 participants	
1965 - The Church Faces Poverty	- 303	"
1966 - The Family in Transition	- 286	"

1965 was an unusually active year for the College of Agriculture in sponsoring events for church leaders. In addition to the annual conference held in February that year, a conference on counseling was held for pastors (65 attended) in September. In December, an Illinois State of Society Conference for Church Leaders was held at our Robert Allerton Park conference facilities. This conference was designed to update denominational "mid-management" personnel on socio-economic trends in the state.

We employed a variety of approaches in our church leadership program. Annual conferences were held usually in January during the University break in classes. Elective evening classes were offered during our annual conference from 1966 through 1970. County and district meetings for rural pastors and other rural leaders were frequently held in the 1930's and 1940's in addition to annual conferences held on campus. During 1966 and 1967 regional meetings for

church leaders were organized by the Cooperative Extension Service using the same general theme and some of the specific topics covered in the state meetings. One of the more recent special programs was a workshop on "Process Skills in Organizational Development" for church administrators held in April 1974.

Two different studies were made by committees during the 1970's to recommend to the University and Extension administrators future directions the Church and Community Institute programs should take. The first committee was organized in 1971 and was composed of College of Agriculture faculty. Its report concentrated on appropriate roles for the Cooperative Extension Service and the College of Agriculture in sponsoring educational programs for church leaders and on the resources available.

The second committee was organized in 1975 and was composed of both clergy and faculty members. Known as the "long-range planning committee" its study culminated in 1976 with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Extension Service and the Church and Community Institute Committee. It emphasized providing both professional and volunteer church and community leaders with information regarding community problems and outlined a procedure for the appointment of Church and Community Institute Committee members.

(I can send copies of both committee reports to anyone interested in seeing them if you will give me your name and address.)

As a result of the Memorandum of Understanding, a serious effort was made to revitalize the Institute Committee though little success resulted in the plan to include community leader representation. Representatives of the Office of Continuing Education and Public Service and the Religious Studies Program at the University of Illinois became actively involved in the committee. 1979 was a

particularly discouraging year for the Committee. With inclement winter weather, attendance at the annual Institute numbered only 35 including several U. of I. faculty. It was decided that a 50th Institute would be held in March, 1980 with an all-out effort to boost attendance and generate new enthusiasm for the program.

Attendance at the 1980 "Fiftieth Anniversary" Institute totaled 123 with 81 clergy present. Many "old-timers" returned to the campus for this event. One of the featured speakers was Marty Martin who we were able to secure under the auspices of our U. of I. Miller Lecture Committee as part of its public lecture series.

The Institute Committee met in May, 1980 to discuss the '80 Institute and make plans for the future. It was at this meeting that the following motion was made and seconded (both by clergy members) and passed:

"Jim Webb moved (seconded by Wayne Rogers) that the Church and Community Institute Committee be disbanded with sincere expression of gratitude and recognition of past accomplishments of the Committee, but with the proviso that the work and goals of the Institute be continued in some fashion by the University and the Extension Service."

The request was then made that faculty at the University in consultation with interested committee members search out possible future directions for continuing education for clergy and community leaders.

Since 1980 Extension specialists as well as other college faculty have participated upon invitation in denominational conferences and in meetings of the Illinois Conference of Churches. Topics generally addressed were related to rural community changes, population trends, land use, hunger and food issues, and agricultural policy. No specific initiatives have been taken by the University, the College or the Cooperative Extension Service to sponsor a

statewide conferences for church leaders. Some private discussions have been held on the possibilities of a "State of Society" meeting involving church and college administrators to discuss major issues in agriculture and rural communities. There is some question whether church leaders, professional and lay, should be singled out as a special audience in any such program.

In retrospect, several factors can be listed that probably contributed to the decision to disband the Committee which in essence brought to a close the sponsorship by Extension of an annual conference for church leaders in Illinois.

These include:

1. General changes in denominations' emphasis upon rural parishes and the demise of denominational rural church committees and commissions which historically provided representation on the Church and Community Institute Committee.
2. Coupled with this change was the difficulty in maintaining a standing Institute committee with clergy representation appointed by denominations.
3. A changed committee composition resulting in uncertainty and some division among committee members over the emphasis the Institute should place on
 - a) rural churches vs. all churches
 - b) clergy as an audience vs. clergy and other community leaders
4. Departure from themes and topics where College of Agriculture and Extension faculty had expertise to broader societal issues where

more of a "brokerage" function in securing speakers was performed by faculty.

5. Overdependence, perhaps, on individual faculty members interests and initiative to provide leadership to the program. Changes in positions, sabbaticals, overseas assignments, etc. hindered continuity of leadership within Extension.
6. Lack of an adequate budget, supported by both church bodies and the College/University, to put the program on a more permanent basis.

We can debate the relative importance of any of the factors just listed and perhaps could add others. I'm sure that there are lessons to be learned and recommendations that can be drawn from the Illinois experience that will be useful to other states.

I personally do not feel that the last chapter in Extension's involvement in continuing education programs for church leaders in Illinois has been written but at this point am not sure what the scenario will be. My expectation is that there will be periodic conferences or workshops for rural clergy planned by ad hoc committees of clergy and college faculty. Obviously this falls far short of a "program". Also knowing our faculty and their interests, I expect to see many of them participating personally as well as professionally in denominational meetings as resource people in their respective areas of expertise.

Despite occasional cynicism I've encountered to the contrary, I firmly believe that our Colleges of Agriculture and Extension are responsive to the needs of local people and dedicated to problem solving in a research and educational context. Identifying the educational needs of clergy and articulating them in constructive dialogue may be the greatest challenge in advancing educational programs for church leaders within our landgrant institutions.